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Susan Hoecker-Drysdale

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WITCH HUNTS AND ENLIGHTENMENT: HARRIET MARTINEAU'S CRITICAL REFLECTIONS ON SALEM

Susan Hoecker-Drysdale

ABSTRACT

Harriet Martineau's first and last articles on American society concerned the Salem Massachusetts witch hunts, trials and executions of 1692. She shared the Victorian fascination with psychological phenomena, especially perception and the power of suggestion, and the sociological aspects of community reactions to 'fitful' and erratic behavior. Martineau insisted that accusations of witchcraft and the responses to them required objective scientific study. Her accounts of events in Salem are used to examine the role of the clergy and organized religion in the community, citizens' vulnerability to accusation, anxiety about colonial life in early America, and panic and mob action. Martineau explores the universal implications of the case.

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O Christian Martyr
 Who for truth could die
 When all about Thee
 Owned the hideous lie
 The world redeemed
 From superstition's sway
 Is breathing freer
 For thy sake today

– Monument for Rebecca Nurse, Danvers, MA

The pursuit of truth is the safest of all quests ... (Martineau, Salem Witchcraft proofs, unpublished, 1868, p. 30)

INTRODUCTION: THE PRESENT EXAMINATION OF MARTINEAU'S INTEREST IN SALEM "WITCHCRAFT"

It is a curiosity that the first and last periodical articles of Harriet Martineau, British sociologist, historian, political economist, and journalist, on American society deal with the subject of the Salem Massachusetts witch hunts and trials of 1692. Her fascination with American society was lifelong, and there are a number of reasons for her interest in the Salem witch hunts. [Martineau spent considerable time in Salem during her travels in America \(1834–36\)](#), made a number of friends in Salem, and had her portrait painted there in 1835 by Charles Osgood.

Furthermore, she shared the Victorian fascination with psychological, physiological, and spiritual phenomena and the accompanying discussions and writings in the face of various "psychic" occurrences such as hysteria and mesmerism. In fact, she uses the Salem witch hunts and trials as a device to analyze the implicated social relationships and institutions in colonial America. Finally, her formal and informal writings on this particular chapter in American history carry the subtexts of her critique of religion and her insights into gender relations, the impact of economic and political problems on social behavior, the consequences of unlimited authority, and the power of fear, suspicion, and surveillance. In several respects, then, a number of Martineau's sociological concerns are embedded in her articles on Salem witchcraft.

The present discussion addresses the frame for Martineau's analyses, that is, her two periodical articles on Salem witchcraft, written in 1831 and 1868, respectively, that take up the writings on that subject by Charles Wentworth

Upham, a Canadian-born Salem, Massachusetts, minister, politician, and writer. Martineau, who had met Upham on her Salem visits, described him as “a pleasant and rather scholarly clergyman of Salem.” She had followed his writings since 1831 when she published an article entitled “On Witchcraft,” a review of Upham’s *Lectures on Witchcraft, comprising a History of the Delusion in Salem*, published in the same year. Her final and major article on Upham’s writings on the subject appeared in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1868, this time a review of Upham’s important two-volume work entitled *Salem Witchcraft* published in 1867 (Upham, 1867, 2000). His writings on Salem witchcraft and the witch hunts were the most extensive and authoritative of that period.

We will consider first the context for Martineau’s 1831 article (1831b) to explore how it grew out of her early writings and concerns. Later, in the course of discussion we take up her 1868 article that is a more detailed sociological analysis of the Salem “witchcraft” event, including an account of the context and events of 1692. There her interests center on the infusion of religious anxieties into community relations, how these play out in terms of gender and authority (sexual politics), and the psycho-social dimensions of religion, magic, and interpersonal relations. The discussion will consider the “deviant behavior” of the young girls and the community response to their accusations that certain of the town’s women and men were witches causing harm to others in the community, including themselves. Finally, we look at the significance of that chapter of American history to Martineau in terms of the meaning of the Salem tragedy for other times and places.

THE CONTEXT: MARTINEAU’S EARLY INTEREST IN DEMONOLOGY AND THE BACKGROUND FOR HER ARTICLES ON THE SALEM WITCH HUNTS

Martineau’s earliest intellectual interests and her writings in *The Monthly Repository* (1822–1831), a Unitarian publication, centered particularly, if not exclusively, on religion. Her personal sensitivities as a child and the early onset of deafness drew her to the church, to discussions of God, and to Biblical literature as a solace from her difficult emotional life. In spite of her religious proclivities as a youth, however, she became an agnostic by the late 1840s. Nevertheless, she retained a lifelong sociological interest in religion as a social institution and as a powerful, if sometimes negative, force in society.¹

Martineau's interest in and knowledge of demonology and witchcraft had developed prior to her focus on the phenomena in America, as seen in her earlier 1831 article "Demonology and Witchcraft" published in *The Monthly Repository* (Martineau, 1836). In this article (1831c), a review of Sir Walter Scott's 1830 *Lectures on Demonology and Witchcraft*, Martineau examines various cases and contexts for appearances, apparitions, and the functioning of mind and imagination. She explores religious and philosophical explanations and finally seeks to understand these phenomena scientifically in terms of the psychology of perception, sensation, and the power of suggestion, reflecting the influence on Martineau of Hartley's associationism.

The greater number of our ideas is compounded from, and all are originated by, sensations. Impressions are actually produced upon the nerves by the reaction of the ideas which are communicated through those nerves ... the most abstract meditations exert some degree of nervous influences as well as the simplest ideas of sensation, though in the first case it may be too faint to be easily recognizable ... The simple ideas which are deposited by sensation, or the compound ideas which are formed by association from the simple ones, are awakened, recalled, or revived, by the action of certain laws of suggestion. The degree of intensity in which they present themselves depends on a multitude of varying circumstances, connected with the state of the body and mind (*Miscellanies*, pp. 106–107)

She goes on to discuss the functioning of the brain in relation to the body, emotions, optic and audio nerves, and ultimately "impressions" or perhaps apparitions, their appearances and revivals, brought on especially by "morbid" states. Ultimately Martineau is convinced that Scott misses the opportunity to provide explanations that go beyond poetics, philosophy, or even medicine. She observes that:

The intellects of thousands have been cramped by irrational fears, their energies perverted by degrading conceptions of the nature of the Deity, their peace broken, and their tempers soured by wrong notions of the purposes and modes of religious obedience. (*Ibid.*, p. 113)

Martineau ends her discussion by counting on the progress of society to provide "higher and better" understandings to replace superstitions, toward greater truths and the development of the mind (*ibid.*, p. 114). She sees progress away from superstition, arbitrariness, and superhuman powers toward rational enlightenment, alluding to the three stages in the progress of society and knowledge (religious, philosophical, and scientific).² She acknowledges that personal spiritualism as related to memory and meaning (for example, in the instance of reflecting upon the departed) is human and natural. Indeed, life memories console and soothe one. Organized

(institutionalized) spiritualism, however, conjuring up apparitions and superhuman forces beyond our control has little credibility with her.

Relevant to Martineau's concerns later with the consequences of witch hunts is another 1831 article, this one on Godwin's *Thoughts on Man* (1831a), in which she emphasizes the primacy of human rights and the need to overcome the great impediment of ignorance and error in our knowledge of "the primary laws of sensation and thought":

... though some must attain a higher dignity and enjoyment than others, every one has a right to his share of those lofty intellectual and spiritual privileges which has hitherto been possessed by a very few whom circumstances have peculiarly favored. (*Ibid.*, p. 122)

MARTINEAU'S ARTICLE ON UPHAM'S *LECTURES ON WITCHCRAFT*

And so she begins her subsequent article, "On Witchcraft," (1831b) appearing later in 1831, on Charles Upham's first *Lectures on Witchcraft*, with the assurance that "the time will come when every man ... will apply his religion for himself; when no one will be needed to stand between God and himself ... All God's children have an equal right, not only to the means of bodily, but those of spiritual life ..." But that does not now exist, she asserts. More pointedly, "If our faith were what it ought to be, the livelong summer of the spirit, there would be no occasion to garner up its privileges in a priesthood" (*ibid.*, p. 388). She goes on to use the historical incidents of "witchcraft" in Salem as a trope for analyzing the following: organized religion and the role of the clergy, the anxieties of colonial life, particularly the impact of economics on social relations, the implications of "official" political opinion and power for ordinary citizens, the epidemics of fear, panic, and mob action, and the psychological and sociological complexities of accusation and persecution.

After asking "And how have the priesthoods of the earth discharged their functions?" she replies that the priesthood has not lived up to its so-called divinity:

Professing to stand between heaven and earth, have they brought down truth from the hand of the God of truth? Have they been the dispensers of peace from the God of Love? Have they watched from their elevated position for the approach of freedom, and ... prepared for its triumph? Have they directed the tendencies of man to high objects and employed his energies aright, as ... if ... they were indeed the privileged agents of Providence? O, no! ... it will be found that priests have flattered the vices, and

taken advantage of the weaknesses of their disciples, ... fomented strife, ... hindered freedom, and above all, kept back or polluted God's own truth. (*Ibid.*, p. 388)

It goes on. She attacks Protestant as well as Roman clergy. It is, then, the continuing "priestly manoeuvring" and "spiritual subservience" that causes the tale of Salem to remain "a tale of the times."

MARTINEAU'S ARTICLE ON UPHAM'S MAJOR WORK ON THE SALEM WITCH HUNTS

In December 1867 Harriet Martineau wrote to Henry Reeve, a cousin and long-time friend and editor of the respected *Edinburgh Review*, with a proposal to write an article for the *Review* on Salem 'witchcraft.'

It could be scarcely possible to exaggerate the value of a sound, calm, liberal – in short, philosophical article in the "Edinburgh" [on a book] which puts us in full possession of the most complete, unconscious, grave & appalling illustration of the mischief of a wrong & obstinate interpretation of facts that cannot be got rid of by denial ... It will not be a light task, – however done. The Salem story is, for that final year, almost unendurably affecting. (HM to Henry Reeve, 12/3/1867)

And a few months later she wrote:

You see, – I know Salem so well, – & its traditions; – I know the dreary 'Witches Hill' so well, – the craggy bit of common where they were hanged in rows; – I know Mr Upham so well, & his mind on the Witch question! And I have studied the physiological aspect of the "spiritual" & mesmeric phenomena so long & so much that I am not afraid of making a fool of myself in the review. (HM to Reeve, 2/23/1868)

In these letters to Henry Reeve, for whose *Review* she had written many articles, Martineau proposes to write a review of Upham's major two-volume work, entitled *Salem Witchcraft*, published in that very year. She had retired, winding down her publishing career and monitoring her heart problems, but she assured Reeve that her head was fine.

I see better, hear somewhat better, read better, & of course write more easily than I did so lately as last autumn, – while suffering more, & being really worse. Jenny & I believe that if I cd set about this particular article immediately, & do it out of hand, while my mind is full of the subject & while we are still in our winter quiet ... we might achieve a success. (HM to Henry Reeve, 2/23/1868)

A friend had written to her about having read an article on Upham's masterpiece on Salem Witchcraft, stating it was praiseworthy but was written "without any attempt at a scientific apprehension" (*ibid.*).

Martineau became determined to show “the evidence of ... such phenomena in all ages & conditions of society, & then show how & why the case is altered in our own time.” Although the assumption of supernatural agency and of spiritual intercourse may have been necessary historically, “the world of spirits” must give way today to the introduction of scientific inquiry into the brain and nervous system.

The work to be done in investigating is obvious enough: – to collect & verify facts; to reject imaginations, & detect imposture, on the one hand, & put every possible check on the prejudices & passions of ignorance on the other; &, for all time to come, to promote, in all possible ways, the study of the whole frame of Man, & of his Brain & its manifestations above all ... & to show how they disclose mental powers & functions only dimly apprehended at present, but probably existing in the Salem victims, as in many persons living round about us now. (*Ibid.*)

PRECONDITIONS: THE CONTEXT OF THE SALEM TRAGEDY

Martineau’s interest in Charles Upham’s work was linked to her acquaintance with him and with the town of Salem, the gem of America of which she was very fond. More importantly, she saw in this case many aspects of society and elements of human behavior that had fascinated her throughout her life. “The tone of manners, the social organization, and the prevalence of the military spirit” (Martineau, 1868a, p. 7) were critical to understand. Reflecting on Upham’s work and her own experience, she identifies the preconditions for the 1692 witch hunt.

Established in 1626 by the Massachusetts Bay Company, Salem was settled by families of good fortune, good education, and aristocratic lifestyles. Originally it was a sophisticated cultured community whose trade contacts had nourished an appreciation for the arts and cultures of the world, apparent in the homes of its citizens and in the extraordinary collection of the Salem museum built by them. The early prosperity of all citizens – farmers, artisans, and aristocrats – eventually was eclipsed by the limits of land and wealth and the slowing of Salem’s world commerce. The psyche of the community became more pessimistic and conflictual (Martineau, 1868a, p. 8). And while every citizen felt a stake in the rule and order of the society, local stratification was clear. The farmers (the yeomanry) living in the outskirts that became Salem Village were separated from the town of Salem residents by church and parish distinctions, occupation, and class, but all cooperated in resisting the Indians when

necessary. Farms became smaller through the generations and farm implements and practices were primitive (Boyer & Nissenbaum, 1974, p. 94). When the land had been distributed and settled, those having none left for Maine to settle there. But “the weaker, more envious, more ill-conditioned remained behind, to cavil at their prosperous neighbours, and spite them if they could” (Martineau, 1868a, p. 8). Emigration had become a sorter of character in the weaker economic groups, according to some. The earlier flow of international commerce had slowed considerably.

The sociological factors contributing to an environment in Salem of fear, suspicion, and general anxiety included: fear in the community of dangerous Indians and pirates, the hardships of debt, intolerable taxation, the loss of original leaders through death or migration, the lack of financial institutions, the absence of commerce and of economic leadership, political jealousies, religious dissensions – often conflict between the congregation and the minister, beliefs about the presence of the Evil One, and, in the immediate, the appearance of “afflictions” in Pastor Parris’s family (Salem Village).

Talk about the “dangers” from the “special enemy,” the Indians, defined as agents of the Satan by the clergymen, created an atmosphere of fear. The Sabbath patrol set up for watching out for Indians also observed who attended church and who did not, noting the activities of the absentees, and reporting these to the authorities, thereby creating ill will, jealousy, and anger in the community. Regarding authority, a gerontocracy had prevailed and the recent loss of some older male leaders had created some anxiety in the community. A heavy emphasis on family life included the frequent practice of adoption when necessary. Emotions ranged from community cooperation (“bees”), romance, recreations, and festive times to envy, jealousy, rash judgments, and slander. Civic squabbles and lawsuits over land were common. The Village and the Town clashed over the Village farmers’ wish to have their own church. This was finally granted but the Old Town Church retained authority over the hiring of ministers. Within a brief period, conflicts over the Salem Village clergy resulted in a succession of four ministers, one of whom, Mr Burroughs, ultimately was among the executed. In spite of differences, they were unified by a common fear of Satan, a Puritan obsession.

“DEVIANT” BEHAVIOR AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

In the state of temper existing among the inhabitants of the village when the mischievous club of girls was formed at the pastor’s house, it was inevitable that, if magic was entered upon at all, it would be malignant magic. (Martineau, 1868a, p. 43)

Within the context of the conditions just discussed, the Salem witch affair began with the strange behavior of two teenage girls (the daughter and the niece of the Reverend Samuel Parris in Salem Village) pursuing their daydreams and immature projections about their futures, love, marriage, and so forth with the patronizing help of Tituba Indian, a West Indian slave, who had participated in an act of “witchcraft” (she had been ordered to by one of the girls’ aunts). The two girls, aged 9 and 11, soon were joined by 11 other “afflicted” teenage girls. In their increasingly odd behavior – incoherent babbling, screaming, fainting spells – typical signs of hysteria, the teenagers ultimately accused Tituba and two older women in the community of bewitching them (Frances Hill).³ The behavior and the accusations that specific adults meant harm to them continued into spring and summer of 1692. In a matter of weeks the two older women were sent to prison. Tituba, a property of Reverend Parris, was not punished and in fact became one of the accusers. The young accusers were not called to account, but rather, believed.

THE COMMUNITY RESPONSE

The momentum of the accusations carried events forward and, no one, neither the girls, the community, the judges, nor the clergy, easily resisted the excitement of the moment. “Courts” (so-called) were set up to hear the cases but the judges manipulated procedures to suit their purposes. Often no hearing or trial occurred, and victims were simply taken to the hill for hanging.

The community view was that the Devil was embodied in a witch, generally but not always female, who then afflicted, distressed, and rendered whomever she would, making them “bewitched” (Martineau, 1831b, pp. 390–393). Women, including the Caribbean slave woman, were the majority of accused; class lines were crossed; several respected men including a minister were among those accused and hanged, and an 80-year-old man was crushed to death. Several died in prison before execution; a 4-year-old girl was imprisoned in shackles; she lost her sanity for life.

The accusations, imprisonments, “trials,” and executions were administered with ruthless disregard for human rights and due process. The roles of Cotton Mather and his father, Increase Mather, in the whole affair have been debated, but Upham was convinced that Cotton Mather was a promoter of accusations and punishment and reveled in the increased authority of the church in the circumstances. Martineau reported Cotton

Mather's estimate of the situation: "In the whole, the devil got nothing, but God got praises, Christ got subjects, the holy spirit got temples, the church got additions, and the souls of men got everlasting benefits" (Martineau, 1831b, p. 397).

Community leaders were corrupted: judges and lawyers exploited the law and dispensed with proper and fair court procedures; the clergy provided the momentum for the whole affair and tried to revive it later; a Salem physician first used the word "witchcraft"; and a culture of fear and violence was sustained. Cotton Mather, Martineau claims, was severely discredited after the fact. He was "a man of great learning and talents, but prone, in a remarkable degree, to all the vices which beset the priestly vocation. He was fanatical and deeply cunning; vain and credulous, with a great outward show of humility; inordinately ambitious of temporal power, while ostentatious of his disinterested piety" (*ibid.*, p. 399). Clergymen refused to pray with or give last rites to victims, chided the victims as they were hanged on the hill, and had no sympathy or aid for the victims' families. In the end, Martineau made it clear that, though the incident was over, the costs were great.

In more general terms it should be recognized that witch-burnings and persecutions within communities were neither new nor limited to Salem. Other instances occurred in Massachusetts and other colonial regions. These were preceded by similar occurrences in Europe over recent centuries. Most witch hunts involved conflicts along class, race, age, and gender lines.

The community response within the context discussed above was in large part a rush to believe in the presence of Satan and in the bewitchment of the girls. An atmosphere of fear and anxiety, fed by unrelated concerns in daily life and in the colonial experience, developed quickly and did not abate for months. Figures in the community power structure became involved and sanctioned the quick dispense of accusation and punishment. Gender and ageism were elements: 13 of the 19 adults hanged were women; the first accused and hanged were older women of 'cantankerous' character. Historically, older women, particularly those who were single or widowed, were regarded with suspicion. But soon other younger women, highly thought of in the community, some of substantial means and status, were accused and imprisoned. The clergy and the magistrates who manipulated the court procedures and punishments were men. Court proceedings were irregular and often eclipsed by the urge to get on with the ultimate punishment.

But as the months went on, with continuing hangings, some in the community began to have doubts about the girls' accusations, about the

guilt of the accused, the extreme response to the accusations, and the fact that those who confessed were excused while those who would not plead guilty were hanged. Doubts were raised about the judges and the court procedures. Ironically, it was Increase Mather, the father of Cotton Mather, who upon the request of the Governor produced an impressive document about the seriousness of proof, that the judges must demand firm evidence of guilt. The events that transpired from February to October 1692 concluded on October 29 when the new Colonial Governor Phipps disbanded the mock courts that had functioned for the community establishment. Accusations, false evidence, suspiciousness of others, presumption of guilt, arrogant assumptions of the powerful, and an atmosphere of fear that had reigned in Salem for most of a year dissipated. The costs had been high, the community broken, the religious and civic principles of the culture trampled. The end of it all was equally disconcerting: "In early 1693, 12 of the so-called jurymen publicly apologized for the errors in their judgments – too late to do much good" (Rapley, p. 97). What are Martineau's observations on the Salem case and what general principles of social science emanate from her analysis?

MARTINEAU'S INTERPRETATION OF THE WITCH HUNTS

By the end of her 1831 article, however, Martineau is not convinced that this is simply a story from the past, a closed chapter in American history:

The days of witchcraft are past; but not the day of the devil, or of his pretended adversaries. We still hear of nocturnal prayer-meetings, of wrestlings with the evil Spirit, of miraculous gifts, of instantaneous conversions, of death-bed conflicts, of social revivals. In all these afterpieces of the Salem tragedy, we find the same performers as there enacted such fearful parts. We still find the devil the bugbear, and the clergy the managers. We still find that the ignorant are cajoled, and that orthodoxy is propped up by the false supports of superstition. We still see those who claim the privileges of the priesthood exhibiting the anti-Christian attributes of a priesthood.

It is true that all these features are modified; it is true that the times are so far ameliorated that the plague of superstition cannot ravage society as formerly. But society is not yet safe. It will not be safe till every man ascertains and applies his Christianity for himself, and no longer needs to flee to his pastor for defence against the devil and all his works. What we have to do is to expose indefatigably the machinery of spiritual delusion; to frown upon all spiritual monopoly; to reveal to the ignorant their own rights, and to protect their claim; and to make the meanest of them as capable as the fisherman of Galilee of testifying to the grace, and glorying in the freedom of the gospel. (Martineau, 1831b, pp. 401–402)

Commenting that instances of “intercourse with spirits” or bewitching have occurred for hundreds of years, as well as in 1692 and today, Martineau asserts that all cases are essentially the same.

In all, some peculiar and inexplicable appearances occur, and are, as a matter of course, when their reality cannot be denied, ascribed to some spiritual agency. We may believe that we could never act as the citizens of Salem acted in their superstition and their fear; and this may be true, though there are signs of willingness to be as cruel to those who perplex us as our witch-hunting forefathers ever were; but our course of speculation is, in our ‘spiritual circles,’ very much the same as in Mr. Parris’ parlour. (Martineau, 1868a, p. 42)

THE MEANING OF THE SALEM TRAGEDY FOR LATER CENTURIES

The “rising hopefulness in ... the study of Man, and the mysteries of his nature” face the resistance of the multitude who cling to inspiration by spirits, those who fear “Materialism” in understanding the interaction of mind and the nerves, those who shrink from any new ideas in matters so interesting, those who fear that religion may be implicated in any slight shown to angel or devil (Martineau, 1868a, p. 44). Even the “indolence of the medical class” in every age of scientific activity results in a “conservative reluctance to change of view or of procedure” (*ibid.*, 1868, p. 46).

Martineau pins her hopes on the truthseekers, a rare class, “these are the few who unite the two great virtues of earnestly studying the facts, and keeping their temper, composure, and cheerfulness, through whatever complexity their inquiry may involve” (*ibid.*). Her heroes in that regard include particularly the Prince Consort who admonished the medical profession for not inquiring into mesmerism, and the late Professor Henry Hallam, who believed that various phenomena related to mesmerism are fragments of some general law of nature (*ibid.* p. 45).

Later, in a section that was in fact edited out of the final printed version of the article, Martineau points to the hospitals in many European cities where diseases are treated by mesmerism and cites Sir Henry Holland’s chapters on mental physiology pointing to the use of mesmeric-like powers in every age. Such openness in the pursuit of knowledge, she continues, stands in great contrast to the dogmatism of Mr Parris, the Salem Village minister, and the wrath of judges who presided over that tragedy (Martineau, 1868c, p. 32, proofs, omitted from published text).⁴

Martineau explains that we remain unable to explain the well-known and indisputable facts that occur from time to time, such as the phenomena of natural somnambulism, of double consciousness, of suspended sensation while consciousness is awake (Martineau, 1868a, p. 42).

We are still very far from *explaining* these mysteries ... being able to refer the facts to the natural cause to which they belong; but we have an incalculable advantage ... in knowing that for all proved facts there is a cause; that every cause to which proved facts within our cognizance are related is destined to become known to us. (*ibid.*)

Even though we still do not understand the law of the mind/body relationship, “we have learned in what direction to search out and have set out on the quest.”

But, she continues, instead of assuming, as Salem citizens did, that they were witnessing the impact of the spiritual (especially the Devil) upon humans, we have our field of observation and study of the brain and the nervous system as organized parts of the human frame. The contrast between today’s calm reasoned approach of science and the horror of dismay by clergy and religious followers three centuries ago is remarkable, even though, she points out, psychology cannot be called a science yet at all and physiology is in a rudimentary state (*ibid.*, p. 47).

Furthermore, the excitement of delusion generates moral vagaries seen in Salem, according to Upham, but he was far from understanding current science and physiological research that we have at our disposal. Martineau asserts that physicians and physiologists can now identify and understand the mental illnesses that afflicted the children and other morbid persons in Salem Village. In another generation science will be able to explain the strange maladies that have afflicted people all over the world. As opposed to the deluded Spiritualists who wish to make an objective world of their own subjective experiences and the conservative reluctance to change of view or procedure by the medical class, the scientific physiologists are proceeding by observation and experiment to penetrate more and more the secrets of our intellectual and moral life (*ibid.*).

Martineau had remained steadfast in her commitment to the objective pursuit of truth through science that she had expressed as early as 1831. “It is not Satan that makes the havoc, but our own ignorance, which has seduced us into a blasphemous superstition, instead of inciting us to the study of ourselves” (*ibid.*).

The truth ... cannot now, after the recent advance of science, be long delayed or repressed; but every attempt to treat it with prejudice or passion and to inflict ... persecution on the persons who produce ... or are the subjects of ill-understood brain or

nerve action, is an evidence abundantly humiliating to the meekest of us that some of the spirit of the clerical, medical, and judicial bigots of Salem survives in our generation. (Martineau, 1868c, proofs, p. 32)

Science carries the intellectual obligation to be objective and reasonable; the community, depending on science for knowledge of human behavior, has the obligation to be moral in human affairs. After investigating the witch hunts in Salem in all their various facets, she concludes that they provide a moral as well as scientific lesson that may still remain unlearned.

It is not possible now for the opponents of calm inquiry to hang their victims; but it is always possible to oppress, suspect, and defame; and the disposition, though doomed by the advance of science ... is not yet so nearly extinct as to permit us to regard the spirit of the Salem tragedy as characteristic of a former stage of the human mind ... (*ibid.*)

Clearly she anticipates the struggles ahead, as we see in our own time, to sustain scientific knowledge against the onslaughts of tradition, passion, slander, and bigotry. And so she ends her original version of the 1868 article with a warning about the dangers of human ignorance, prejudices, and conceits that remain ever present in modern society.

This piece of English-American social history has not been revived, we may hope, to be dismissed as a literary curiosity. It will be long before either English or Americans will have outgrown its uses as a remonstrance in regard to some faults in the past and present, and a warning as to recurring liabilities in the future. (*ibid.*)

These critical conclusions, appropriate even in our times, were omitted from the published text.

NOTES

1. Her numerous early articles and books included three prize-winning essays intended to present Unitarianism to Catholics, Jews, and Muslims, *Traditions of Palestine*, *Five Years of Youth*, and many others. Although she was quite religious as an adolescent, she acknowledges in her Autobiography that by 1831 she “had ceased to be a Unitarian in the technical sense” (Auto., p. 158). Her “final severance from her faith” (Auto., p. 159) was complete by 1848 when she published *Eastern Life*, her account and interpretation of Middle East history and its religions.

2. *Ibid.* (pp. 114–115). Martineau was introduced to the work of Saint Simon by Gustav D'Eichtal in 1831 and was intrigued with theories of societal evolution as connected to the progression of science. The theory of the three stages of social evolution, religious, metaphysical or philosophical, and scientific was elaborated by Auguste Comte, student and secretary of Saint Simon, whose major work *Cours de Philosophie Positive* Martineau edited and translated in 1853. She became committed

to positive philosophy or sociology as the only remedy for the “uncertainties of the age” (Hoecker-Drysdale, 1992, pp. 28,47,101,110–111).

3. The events in Salem are discussed by Martineau. Other accounts which have provided some additional detail here and which analyze the Salem situation can be found in Frances Hill (2002), Robert Rapley (2007), Richard Trask (1992, 1997), Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum (1974), and Richard Weisman (1984).

4. Mesmerism or animal-magnetism assumed that humans have a magnetic fluid that, under principles of electricity and magnetism, allows certain persons to magnetize others, relieve pain and induce sleep, or somnambulism. This practice of treating or healing physical and mental problems was called “hypnosis” by 1843. See Pichanick (1980, p. 130) and Hoecker-Drysdale (1992, pp. 81–82) and *passim*.

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